

Comments on Hispanic Influences in Sport

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The study of sport during the past decade, inspired by earlier pioneering work, has concentrated heavily on the impact of industrialization. More recently, this has been related to the concept of “modernity” and “modernization.” Yet there may be some dangers in taking the model of modernity, to the extent that it is culturally dependent on the experience of western Europe and North America, and seeking to apply it or use it as a test in other cultures. Thus, the work of Beezeley, LeCompte, and Slatta becomes interesting in terms of a significant historiographic and interpretative issue, as well as in its own right as an explication of previously unknown or little known sports of Hispanic societies.

In a sense, all of their essays show us cultures pressured by modernization and antipathetic toward it, as well as cultures ardently promoting modernization. Various sports suit each approach –but seemingly different sports depending upon the positive or negative view of modernity. Yet even the “modernizing” elements in Hispanic societies seem to have had problems groping with the dilemma of simultaneously developing nationalism (including nationalism in sports) as a vehicle for firming up society and the state while at the same time seeing modernization itself as an international process (which consequently made “exotic” native sports seem inappropriate, dooming them to opposition and even persecution).

It is possible that through the study of Hispanic cultures we may begin to test whether the model of modernity (such as has been elaborated well by Allen Guttmann) has a descriptive and analytical utility outside western European and North American cultures. Moreover, if such a model proves inapplicable, a search toward a new and parallel synthesis will become necessary. Toward such a conclusion, one is impelled by the case-studies provided by Beezeley, LeCompte, and Slatta.